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ABSTRACT

This collection of brief articles, targeting middle school educators, features ideas for reading improvement. The following articles are included: "Special Ed Students Should Read and Re-read for Fluency"; "Collaboration between Special Education and Regular Education: What It Is and How We Make It Work" (Deborah LeGrande); "Newspapers, an Excellent Source for Classroom Activities"; and "Reading Groups Improve Student Comprehension." (NKA)

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Reading Matters

Information and Ideas from the Middle School Reading Special Interest Group a Part of the International Reading Association

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September 1999

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Information
and Ideas
From the Middle School
Reading Special Interest
Group of the International
Reading Association

Reading Matters

September 1999

Special Ed Students Should Read and Re-read for Fluency

One of the most difficult tasks facing reading teachers is increasing reading fluency among their students. For the teacher with a classroom filled with students from all reading levels, this task is amplified. To complicate matters further, most regular classroom teachers are responsible for improving the reading fluency of special education children. By employing the read and re-read technique, teachers can dramatically increase the speed of students' reading by improving decoding skills while at the same time increasing the number of sight words in the student's memory.

The day a child begins learning to read, he or she memorizes words by sight. Once the student reaches fourth or fifth grade, many new, more complex words are recognized by sight. Teachers working collaboratively with a resource teacher in an inclusion environment can help their special education student dramatically increase their fluency by employing the read and re-read method. The teacher begins this technique by selecting a text the student is capable of reading. The student then reads the text orally to the teacher or a peer tutor one time to receive guidance on unfamiliar words. Then, the student practices the text several more times alone, in pairs, or small groups. Soon, the student can read the text with little or no errors or unwarranted hesitation.

This method can be enhanced with sight word cards for the new or more difficult words within the text. With sight word cards, students can be paired off and work for five to ten minutes a day drilling each other. This simple technique benefits many special education students each year, but can also help any child that is behind his or her grade level in reading.

See page 5 for more information about inclusive classrooms

The Presidents Message:

The closing session of the IRA Conference in San Diego featured Esme Raji Codell who shared her early teaching experiences. These charming anecdotes appear in her book *Education Esme* (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1999).The talk inspired me to think about one of my earliest encounters with education.

"LEADERSHIP: The art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it." Although General Eisenhower was speaking about army troops, I learned that this is an equally true statement when applied to teaching. Gaining the respect as a teacher from five seventh and eighth graders, posed one of my most difficult challenges. A person can think of herself as a leader, but she is not really a leader until another person sees her that way. I learned this the day I walked into the junior high classroom at the Cohesion Day School.

I had planned to spend the day quietly observing this class of five profoundly mentally and behaviorally disturbed boys before taking on the job as teacher's aide for the remainder of my Winter Break. After all, I was a college junior and a biology major not a teacher trained to work with mentally disturbed students. And I was doing my neighbor, the school director, a favor while she searched for a more appropriate candidate to take the job. I must admit, I had always wondered about what it would be like to be a teacher and I had actually experienced some success at it when my friend Heather and I had won the right to teach our Advanced Placement Biology class on Senior Student-Teacher day at our high school. Everyone loved the lesson. I guess I did have some experience after all. What could be so different here? I quickly realized something was missing. There was no teacher present!

I was entering a battlefield. Unlike students in most of my classes in high school who sat quietly at their desks taking notes and contemplating their next profound question, the students in this class were raucous, walking on the tables, ripping the paper off the bulletin boards, and smashing their recently-made craft project, popsicle stick houses.

My first instinct was to retreat. How could I be a teacher, especially at a school for antisocial and behaviorally disturbed children? Nevertheless, my feet remained glued to the spot just inside the doorway. There was no other adult in the room and I had been instructed by the principal to monitor the class until another teacher's aide could join me. Within the chaos, a couple of the boys noticed me, and Richie, who was sprawled across a desk in a pose I had never seen in a school before, arms flying at his side, legs scissoring the air, discharged the first shot, "Who are you?" he fired.

"I'm Ms. Katz," I told him. I later learned that Richie was an Attention Deficit Disorder sufferer, a compulsive liar, and abused at home. At this moment he just seemed dangerous. I tried to appear confident and in control. "I'm going to help in this class for the next few weeks. Now, why don't you all get your books and sit down?" My initial instructions in this classroom, were promptly ignored. Seeing that I needed a change of plan, I walked around the room, interrupting the boys in their wanton acts of destruction, and asked them about themselves. Although one boy was perched on the windowsill and another stood firmly on a desk, the room quieted down, and the violence ceased. "Take out your school books," I ordered. "I want to see what you are studying." As I spoke, the classroom became silent and the havoc stopped. The students looked up at me expectantly. My moment of triumph turned to fear. What should I do now? I didn't know what they were assigned to study. I was just supposed to observe things. To my relief, Joanne, a more experienced teacher's assistant, entered the room.

"Use this time for study hall," she commanded. Then, turning away from the students, she shifted her attention to me. "The regular teacher thought there would be a snow day. She won't be here. You'll be teaching the science class later this morning. They say you're

great at science. It should be easy for you. You can teach whatever you want. See you later."

I had already discovered that leadership could not be forced on this group. Getting control of this class would require tactical strategies worthy of General Eisenhower himself. Motivation would be the key to gaining leadership over them. I had to motivate these bellicose students to want to do what they didn't want to do. This was beginning to look like a major life test.

That morning I observed the psychologist try to conduct a group session. The students were disreperous and resistant to the therapy. I watched another teacher's assistant try to teach a history lesson with no more ease or control than I had when I first entered the classroom. Teaching these students was like being overrun by the Viet Cong. I never knew where they were. I could never tell what they would do and I could never fathom when or why they might do it.

And what would I teach? Heather and I had done our lesson on diffusion. Since there were no books or equipment at the school, knowing the material would be my only asset. All morning I pondered my lesson and decided that I wanted to make it fun and interactive. To engage these students in anything beyond simple combat, I would have to teach a lesson they couldn't oppose and teach it in a way they couldn't defy.

Lucky for me, my mom was a teacher. She firmly believed in the workshop approach. "It's always better to do it than say it," she always said. Heather and I had kept her advice in mind when we planned our Senior Student-Teacher lesson. Now, I hoped to call upon this wisdom to help me survive under fire.

In the late morning, it was my turn to teach a science lesson on cell membranes and diffusion. Once I had settled the enemy down, I used colorful pens on the overhead to teach them some important vocabulary words and the fundamentals of a cell membrane. They listened calmly probably because I promised that they could move around the room after I was finished with the basics. Once I clicked the overhead off and told them they could sit anywhere they wanted, they bolted to the spots that they had occupied previously that morning. Richie planted himself on the desk. Jack rotated in a corner. Harry stood on a table. Chris commandeered the window sill. Stuart, a 13-year-old, 300 pound, selective mute, sat under a desk seemingly oblivious to what was going on.

I pulled an atomizer bottle of Miss Dior perfume out of my purse and sprayed it in one corner of the room. As I sprayed, I explained how the particles would diffuse throughout the area. They watched me intently as the scent drifted through the air.

Then my heart did a flip. Stuart was the first to smile as he savored the scent. Most of the time it appeared that he was not listening or reacting at all. Dared I hope he was actually paying attention. After all of them had detected the perfume, I told them that we were going to make a human cell membrane with our bodies. Chris was suffering from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, he hated to be touched and would not allow anyone to come within an perimeter of ten inches. Now he stood surprisingly close to Stuart, with Richie's chin placed firmly on his shoulder. Hyperactive Jack was still spinning, but closer to the other three--a rogue cell in their vibrating organelle. I told Harry, who suffers from child schizophrenia and was, at the moment, screaming about the police, that he and I would be the particles trying to get through the cell membrane. As the kids moved closer and then farther from each other, I grabbed Harry's hand and we tried to get through the "human-cell membrane" by maneuvering the trenches and traps it presented to us. We finally made it with a clever stratagem. Our ploy was to pretend to move to the left then drive straight ahead. Everyone dissolved in laugher, even Stuart.

I was amazed that all of them were occupied and paying attention, so I confidently went on to demonstrate cell pores, non polar and polar molecules. This kept us busy and giggling until the lunch bell sounded and the kids seemed

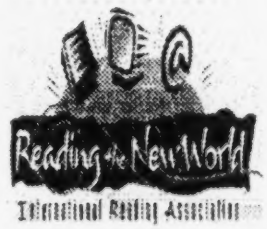
to forget what we had just been doing and ran down the hall to the lunch room.

I was exhausted and relieved. I had taken one steep peak but I knew there would be many more, higher and more hazardous in the next two weeks. I would be require to come up with numerous lessons and fight countless battles with the demons that plagued these unfortunate children. I realized I had something inside me I had not known before. What had seemed like a part-time job became one of the most difficult struggles of my life. In the past, I had used my determination to defeat a difficult subject in school. I would just sit down and study until I overcame any obstacle. No problem I encountered previously had ever seemed impossible. Now my obstacles were human beings who would not sit quietly on a page of text like a problem waiting to be solved.

Maintaining classroom control and my own personal dignity took every ounce of energy I possessed. I would drag home to dinner with my mom each evening with a new respect for teachers and the hurdles they vault every day. I had a few more successes and many failures. Edible finger paint was one of the latter and something I'd rather not think about again. But I came away from the experience with a deeper understanding of people and the human spirit. In education the battles are won in inches. The first day I had won an inch. By using active engagement to motivate my students, I had been able to teach a concept and they had wanted to learn it. In those moments, I was a real leader. In each case I had gotten someone else to do what I wanted him to do because he wanted to do it.

Claudia Katz

45th Annual



April 30 - May 5, 2000

SEND YOUR LESSON PLANS AND IDEAS TO RUN IN THE NEXT ISSUE! Please e-mail to: BEANYBAGS@AOL.COM Thanks!

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Collaboration Between Special Education and Regular Education: What it is and how we make it work

by Deborah LeGrande, Ms. Ed.
Instructor for State University of West Georgia

Webster defines collaboration as, "working together". When it comes to the millions of special education children being served in our public schools all over this country by the regular education teacher and the special education teacher, it is paramount to the positive outcome for each child that both educators collaborate. Unfortunately, this is not always what is taking place in our schools.

Most of our physically, mentally, and emotionally challenged students are being taught

Working together is the key to the success of special education students.

for at least a portion of the day by both the special and regular education teachers. This arrangement often raises the question of "ownership." That is, who is ultimately responsible for the student? The answer is that the regular classroom teacher and the special education teacher (resource teacher, resource teacher/consultant, consulting teacher) are jointly responsible for the student's program. While specific responsibilities may differ, the goal for both teachers is to teach the student in a way that promotes maximum growth and does not leave either teacher with the feeling that the responsibility is his or hers alone. When special educators and regular teachers work together, their success often hinges on the communication between them. The special educator who "knows it all," or acts as if the regular teacher knows very little, is not likely to be asked to help or assist in any aspect of the student's program again. Collaboration is a success only when teachers view each other as skilled and dedicated professionals with individual strengths and teaching styles and with the best interest of the student as their number one priority.

It should be clear by now that any effective special education program is very dependent on a close, mutually supportive alliance between the resource teacher and the regular classroom teachers. Without such a partnership, the resource room runs the risk of becoming just a pull-out program. In this case it is not likely that students' gains will generalize or that they will eventually return to the regular classroom full-time. Whether it is curriculum modifications, physical modifications and accommodations, or behavioral considerations, all of these obstacles can be overcome by working together as a team. That also means utilizing all of the resources available to your school system. When we all work together or "collaborate" not only does the special student thrive, but so does the regular classroom student and the teachers involved.

When Special Ed and Regular Ed teachers work together, everyone is a winner. Become an active part of a winning team in your school today!

Time to Renew!

Another year has passed, and it's time to renew your membership. In addition to being sure to send your membership fee to our treasurer, take a minute to check the items at the bottom of the form that you may be able to assist with during the year.

Middle School Reading Special Interest Group
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City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____

E-mail _____ IRA Membership Number _____

Please make check for $8.00 payable to MSRSIG. Your cancelled check will be your receipt.
Please mail this form with check to: Eileen Diamond, 6644 Chaparral Ct.
Cincinnati, OH 45233

Join Us in Active Membership

(Please check the ones that sound like you!)

- ☐ I could write a "My Students' Favorite Books" article for the newsletter.
- ☐ I could write about a professional book for the newsletter.
- ☐ I could write up one classroom idea or strategy for the newsletter.
- ☐ I could help evaluate literacy award nominees.
- ☐ I could be part of a membership committee.
- ☐ I could assist in planning the conference program.
- ☐ You could put me on the list of "willing members" who would help with various projects.
- ☐ I'd like to submit a proposal for the annual meeting at the IRA convention.
- ☐ I could assist the treasurer.
- ☐ I could assist the newsletter editor.

Book Review of *Brian's Winter* by Gary Paulsen

Brian's Winter, by Gary Paulsen. Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. (1540 Broadway, New York, New York 10036), 1996. 133 pp. $4.99.

Author Gary Paulsen opens the novel with an explanation to his reading audience that *Brian's Winter* is a follow up to his Newberry Honor-winning novel, *Hatchet*. Paulsen describes receiving hundreds of letters wanting to know what would have happened if the main character in the story, Brian Robeson, had not been rescued from the Canadian wilderness. In response, Paulsen continues the story of *Hatchet* as if no rescue occurred in *Brian's Winter*.

Brian's Winter is an exciting adventure novel for students in the middle grades. The main character is a thirteen year old boy, with whom middle grader can identify. Readers will find themselves talking about the hardships Brian faces when he is alone in the forest, and forced to survive or die. Paulsen's descriptions of the hardships of survival touch the reader's soul. Middle grade readers will find this novel exciting to read and difficult to put down.

Paulsen devotes part of the first chapter as an introduction for the new reader to Brian and his isolation. A quick flashback explains that Brian is the survivor of an airplane crash leaving him alone in the desolate Canadian wilderness. Surviving for fifty-four days with no supplies, Brian returns to the wrecked plane to scavenge for supplies. Brian recovers a survival pack containing tools essential for survival.

Accepting his fate, Brian refuses to give up, and struggles to survive. Survival means defending himself from wolves, bears, moose and even a skunk. Brian reaches a new level of maturity and learns to "do what you can as you can. Trouble, problems, will come no matter what you do, and you must respond as they come."

Brian faces a bleaak, cold winter alone. The adventure and excitement intensify when Brian hunts to survive, narrowly escaping death by a moose. Using his lance, he kills the animal, but is saddened by the death. However, he realizes that one must die so another can live, and is able to accept his brutal act.

Gary Paulsen writes *Brian's Winter* in a style that is exciting, easy to read, and enjoyable. Most impressive is the way Paulsen incorporates complex problem solving situations which must overcome in order to survive. One example is when Brian makes his "war bow," the reader shares the thinking process.. The inclusion of situations that must be overcome is an inventive way to teach young adults that no situation is impossible.

Brian's Winter presents the realities of survival to the reader. Following each exciting episode, Brian develops a new respect for the perfection of nature. While surviving, Brian's thoughts return to his lost home life and the reader knows more than anything he wants to return to his family. Through it all, the reader is motivated by the knowledge that if Brian Robeson can survive a winter in the Canadian wilderness, life in "the world" can be survived, too.

Middle graders love excitement and adventure. *Brian's Winter* is an unforgettable novel every middle grader should read. *Brian's Winter* would be an excellent addition to any classroom or home library, and a story that all who read want to share with others.

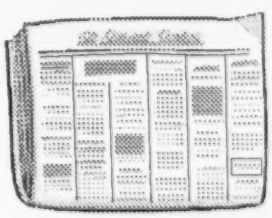
Newspapers an Excellent Source for Classroom Activities

Middle grades English teachers have many duties and responsibilities to their students beyond the basic educational requirements prescribed by the school system in which they work. Students are in the transitional phase between childhood and becoming a young adult so must be prepared for life beyond the classroom. While the main emphasis on the middle grades teacher is to pass on the legacy of their specialty, whether English, Science, Mathematics, or Industrial Arts, life preparation should not be exempted from the curriculum. Newspapers in the classroom provide educators with a link between the subject being taught, and the real world beyond the classroom. With careful planning, the teacher can and should incorporate the use of the local newspaper, because it is a text the student will use throughout life. Also, newspaper articles are prime examples of clear, concise, and simple writing which exemplify a reason for writing. Finally, many activities can be created using the newspaper as the primary text to promote a well-rounded individual able to go beyond the classroom and successfully conquer the demands of adult life.

Middle grades teachers can use newsprint to promote and improve reading and communication skills. News stories, feature articles, editorials, political cartoons, and advertisements provide windows of learning opportunities to students ranging from basic reading comprehension, practical vocabulary, and even high levels of critical thinking. An effective technique used by Marty Cummings, a middle grades teacher, is to have students scan the newspaper, select two articles, and summarize the articles. Cummings claims that his students reading comprehension skills have increased since his implementation of this simple assignment.

Students can also search articles for unfamiliar vocabulary words, then define and use the words in an original story. Vocabulary assignments like this aim to increase vocabulary awareness plus reinforce creative writing. To improve communication skills, the secondary teacher should encourage the students to discuss topics presented in the newspapers. Critical analysis of the stories appearing in newspapers cultivates critical thinking in the minds of the students which is an essential element of survival in adult life.

A plethora of activities are available using the newspaper, which can be adapted to any subject area taught in school. The March 8, 1998 edition of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* offers to the science teacher articles concerning Atlanta's bad air, infectious diseases, unusual weather conditions in Louisiana, and the dangers of tobacco use. For the Social Studies or History teacher, articles abound including the revitalization of South Korea, civil rights landmarks through out Alabama, abortion clinic suspected bomber Eric Rudolph, as well as multiple articles on international news. The advantage of teaching English is that all topics are open for review.



Each article appearing in the newspaper can be used in the English classroom for discussion, or dissection. Discussions open windows of opportunities for students to share their opinions and ideas with their classmates and teacher. Dissection of the articles would

include finding out the who, what, when, where, why and how of the article. Teacher directed activities can focus on the variations of perspectives in different articles, the style of writing - whether factual or opinion based, or the articles can be used as springboards to launch a writing assignment or reader's theater.

Newspapers also offer the potential for increasing a student's personal growth. Students are on the threshold of maturity and need to understand what is required to survive the transition from childhood and dependence to adulthood and independence. A thorough unit plan in the English classroom focusing on the realities of adult life should be a fundamental part of the curriculum. An example of a life skills lesson plan would include creating a fictitious life including a home, car, career, and education. *Newspapers in Education* research suggests a lesson plan, which concentrates, on creating a budget and lifestyle the student will be happy with. The student begins by selecting from the classified section a job they are interested in. Then, the student researches the job selection for educational requirements and colleges or technical schools providing the required training, and then the student develops a time line for completion of school. The student again searches the classified section for a salary range for his or her field, then finds an apartment or a house located in the area of town he or she would like to live. Finally, the students create a budget with the money they will earn. Students are amazed at the complexities of adult life, and are surprised at how quickly budgeted money disappears. This unit is excellent for life preparation.

Another useful plan for newspapers in the classroom is to scrutinize the structure and development of a newspaper, and use it as a springboard for a classroom publication. The classroom publication can be used to develop a creative newspaper concerning events in the community, the school, or even a work of literature being studied. Publishing in the classroom gives the writer an audience and lends an air of authentication to the purpose of writing. Students discover that writing extends beyond writing to please the teacher to writing to engage an audience. The difficult and time-consuming task of editing and rewriting becomes an essential part of the writing process. Publishing involves the ego of the student, which is the strongest incentive for the student writer to keep writing. By providing students a purpose for writing, the teacher takes what some students consider to be a laborious task and transforms the task to a fun way of learning.

Contact your local newspaper for ideas and research on Newspapers in Education

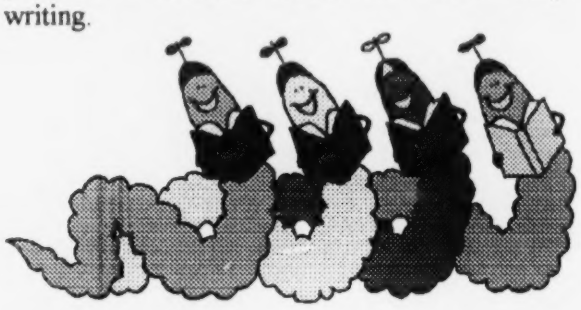
Please be sure to renew your subscription to The Middle School Reading Special Interest Group newsletter today! Renewal application can be found on page six (6) of this issue.
Thank you!

READING GROUPS IMPROVE STUDENT COMPREHENSION

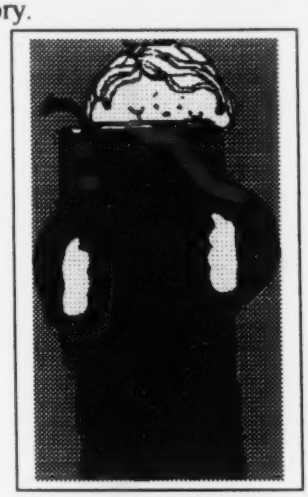
Reading groups have been an integral part of the classroom for years. It is a well-known and accepted fact that students increase their level of comprehension of stories through discussions. There are two basic types of discussions: whole class and small group. By switching from whole class to small group discussions, teachers can create an environment rich in literary understanding.

The purpose of a book discussion is multifaceted. The students have the opportunity to voice their opinion, listen to other opinions; share view points, and assimilate knowledge. Students need multiple opportunities to talk about the texts they read.

In the whole class setting, ideally the teacher should spend time modeling a group discussion. The teacher should read aloud to the class with much enthusiasm to create an enthusiastically contagious class. Frequently, the teacher should pause to ask thought-provoking questions about the text and incorporate predictions to the outcome of the text. Using a Fishbowl or Hot Seat, students take on the role of a character in the story and answer questions posed by the rest of the class. Brainstorming or clustering generates ideas, impressions, facts, etc. spontaneously and provides a concrete model for future essay writing.



In small, student led groups, teachers can provide a list of questions for the group to answer, or allow an open-ended discussion of the text. The discussions should focus on different cognitive perspectives on the text. In this setting, each group can be assigned a different story, or all groups can read the same story.



When the entire class reads a short story or novel, students can split into focus groups where they become "experts" on a specific part of the book or literary element. Once the students complete their focus activity, they return to their "home" group to share their expertise. The home group can create a project or demonstrate their learning.

Social interaction is an important part of learning, and the teacher should take time in creating activities which encourage sharing of ideas. Students need to respect one another, to engage in conflict around ideas rather than personalities, and to encourage each other and support the learning of their peers. In this type of environment, students gain confidence in themselves as readers and learners leading to the ultimate goal: creating life-long, independent readers and learners.